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THE ROLE OF THE NEW ENGLAND
REGIONAL COMMISSION IN THE
BICENTENNIAL CELEBRATION

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Prepared for
The New England Regional Commission

Prepared by
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Washington, D.C.

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Introduction

In 1975 and 1976 a nationwide celebration will mark the 200th anniversary of the United States. The Bicentennial Celebration will be in reality many celebrations, large and small, catering to different interests and to the different histories of regions and people. It may include a world's fair; groups in Boston and Philadelphia are interested. It most certainly will include many more modest efforts by towns and cities, fraternal organizations, State and Federal agencies concerned with our historical heritage, universities, and coalitions of these.

Robert R. Nathan Associates, Inc., was retained by the New England Regional Commission to assess the potential role of the Commission in the planning and preparation of Bicentennial activities, with particular emphasis on the proposed Boston Bicentennial Exposition. Specifically, we were asked to review methods of planning and organizing a world's fair; to evaluate the present status of various proposals for the Bicentennial Exposition; to outline the steps necessary to bring the Exposition to Boston in 1975/76; and to evaluate the role of the Commission in effectively supporting Boston's proposal and bid.

Initially, the promotion of a world's fair in Boston seemed an ideal role for the Commission. Our contacts with the fair's supporters, however, indicated that the fair will not and cannot be a regional event -- it will be the Boston

World's Fair, not a New England World's Fair. In addition, the Freedom '75 group which is planning and promoting the Boston Fair has already become deeply involved in the planning process and is, in fact, a going-concern with needs for assistance from other agencies fairly well defined at this point.

However, the selection of a site and the determination of methods of financing the Bicentennial Exposition will probably be a difficult and protracted process. The result cannot be predicted now. Furthermore, the decision-period may well extend into the period when preparation of the fair site should be under way. It appears now that the go-ahead from the Federal Government cannot possibly be obtained before early 1970. This leaves only five years for a fair such as Boston contemplates, and five years is close to the absolute minimum construction period.

If Boston's application is not approved, it might be too late to develop other activities to fill the vacuum. Also, even if the Fair is located in Boston, it will not exhaust the possibilities for celebration of the Centennial in the region, or even in Boston itself. Therefore, other plans for the Bicentennial should be considered and formulated.

In view of the above, it was decided that a report limited to the original scope would not be as useful to the Commission as a broader inquiry that includes all aspects of the Bicentennial celebration for the region.

The Commission can develop a regional program of activities independent of the Exposition. Preliminary suggestions for appropriate activities and alternative methods

of financing are discussed below. We recommend that the Commission sponsor a special committee charged with considering and refining these and any additional suggestions.

The Commission should continue to assist Boston to get the Fair; for example, by helping to mobilize the political support that will be needed. Also, it is obvious that in the end, two programs -- the Boston Exposition and a regional program of activities sponsored by the Commission -- cannot be entirely independent. This is especially true if the Boston Fair draws heavily on local sources of finance. Because of these considerations, and because the Commission will want to do what it can to help Boston to get the Fair, Boston's plans for the Fair and chances for success are also discussed below. However, the basic purpose of this report is to propose that the program for celebration of the Bicentennial throughout the New England region, whether or not the Fair takes place in Boston, should be initiated and planned by the New England Regional Commission.

The Bicentennial in New England -- Theme and Purpose

Historically, New England has much to commemorate on the 200th anniversary of the Nation. As the origin and battleground of the American Revolution, New England's history is certainly basic to the history of the Nation. However, New England history since that time should not be overlooked. If one thinks of the primary American characteristic as the ability to innovate and adapt rapidly, by and large peacefully, the 200-year history of New England becomes especially meaningful. Here, perhaps more than anywhere else in the United States, social and economic change has been guided by the strong traditions and institutions that represent the cornerstone of democracy.

Thus, history in New England is not found solely in representations of a static past, but can be viewed as representing the Nation's ability to draw on the resources of the past to meet the problems of the present and future. We suggest that the Bicentennial be guided by this broader concept.

This concept would not detract from the commemorative aspect of historical events; rather, it would emphasize the real importance of these past events as part of a continuum of events influencing the present, and emphasizing potential for change in the future.

Inherent in this point of view is the assumption that the Bicentennial Celebration will combine the aims of celebration with investment for the future. Obviously the Bicentennial will contain an element of extravagance -- we don't celebrate a 200th anniversary every year -- but the large sums of money involved and the enormous effort required, in the face of the critical nature of social problems facing the Nation today, demand a greater social and cultural return than merely commemoration of our past with light-hearted frivolity.

The Bicentennial could provide an occasion for generating public and private enthusiasm to mobilize resources -- human and financial -- from new sources, in new combinations, and for new ends.

The proposed Boston fair does not need this justification. As noted below, the Federal Government is expected to be its largest supporter, and if the Congress can be convinced of this, there will be a clear gain for Boston

and New England. But any project financed largely in New England -- by States, cities, or private groups -- would raise the question of return on investment -- social, cultural, and economic. The most efficient celebration -- if we may use the word in this context -- would be designed to elicit human effort and real resources otherwise unavailable for public use in support of goals otherwise unattainable. . . .

Regional Bicentennial Projects

From the point of view of the Commission, the Bicentennial is especially important to the extent that it can provide a climate for regional cooperation. A wide variety of potential activities can be considered.

At the economic level, the Bicentennial would provide an excellent opportunity for extending regional cooperation in tourism promotion and tourist services. Whether there is a world's fair or not, the numerous smaller events around New England during the Bicentennial period are certain to attract visitors in larger numbers than usual, if there is effective promotion. Much could be done to encourage visits to New England, not only by promoting the tourist attractions in the region, but also by providing the kind of services that suggest a regional tour to visitors.

Another pertinent subject for regional cooperation might be found in the area of historical preservation. New England's rich history has left its traces in such profusion that they are taken for granted; there may be some danger now that even the most famous monuments will be lost. The Bicentennial would be an excellent time for a reevaluation of the inventory and perhaps for formulating a coordinated

approach to the problem. At the very least, exchanges of information and ideas among the various State and local agencies concerned would be useful.

For the Commission, efforts of this type would be relatively modest and relatively safe. The Commission could act as a catalyst and a forum for discussion. No extensive funding would be needed; it would probably not be difficult to obtain the support of the States.

On a more ambitious, but perhaps more rewarding level, the Bicentennial could provide an occasion for meeting regional and local social and cultural needs through regional action. To the extent that something of permanent value is left after 1975/76, New England will have gained far more than tourist expenditures. Let us make some specific suggestions, without attempting to exhaust the field or set priorities.

New England has long been a leader in higher level education and research. Yet in New England, as everywhere, new demands for education and the need for a broader and deeper research effort are rendering existing facilities inadequate. Part of the Bicentennial could be the endowment of a new institution in the area designed to meet one or both of these needs.

Alternatively, the existing intellectual resources of the area could be mobilized to meet a particular need in a specialized area of research or instruction. One such area might be the study of regional development; another, the study of New England's cities and their problems.

The general field of the arts is also fertile ground. New England has a traditionally rich cultural life. One way to build on the existing base is to mitigate the heavy concentration of existing facilities in the Boston area. The permanent funding of a traveling repertory theatre company which would be able to reach the smaller cities might be appropriate, for example. Another approach would be to provide aid for artists who show promise, or for innovative institutions such as ghetto theaters.

Another approach would be the creation of a permanent institution, a New England Arts Center, which could fill a number of needs simultaneously. Such a center could provide a workshop for established artists, a training ground for younger artists, and a cultural facility for the region. It could concentrate on the creative arts, the performing arts, or both; it could be primarily oriented toward providing an environment for artists to work and learn in, or toward providing a forum for the performance and exhibition of work otherwise unlikely to be given a public showing; or toward filling the growing public demand for cultural fare.

These suggestions could undoubtedly be improved upon by those involved in education and the arts in New England. Our point is simply that there are many projects which could generate regional interest and support, and would draw heavily on existing expertise in the community, thus increasing the chances of success.

Another set of possible activities are those which meet a pressing social problem on essentially unknown terrain. For example, it is easier to create a university than to educate those who most need to be educated -- the poor and

the unemployed. There would be nothing more appropriate on our 200th anniversary than to acknowledge that we have less cause for self-congratulation than for effort to fulfill the goals of the revolution as we interpret them today. Of course, no expert can tell us how to solve present problems. But, to take one example, new approaches to the problems of urban life would be challenging and appropriate, even if such approaches were not guaranteed of success.

Clearly, the ghetto will not be gone by 1976; then, as now, there will be a need for improving urban life by working within the existing urban environment. There are many ideas of how to do this -- some of the most interesting have been developed in New England's universities. All of them depend on enlisting the support of the community; once this is done, improvement can be purchased at a low money cost. An important and lasting symptom of urban vitality is the rise of new leadership in the ghettos (a pertinent example is found in Boston's Roxbury). If this leadership could be convinced that constructive action can arise out of the Bicentennial, much would be gained. Such activities could, of course, spend money in the ghettos, and there is no doubt that money is needed, but a number of less costly modes are available. The recent success of the East Harlem clean-up in New York demonstrated that Americans are still capable of voluntary action.

The concept that the celebration might be used as an occasion for useful community activity does not apply only to the urban areas, of course, although it is in the big cities that the need for action is most obvious and most pressing.

Another possibility is using the Bicentennial as an occasion for corporate participation in the revitalization

of the inner city. Again, there is a great deal of disagreement about whether this is a workable solution. But many people, in and out of industry, have offered ideas; these should be given a chance.

We hope that this brief discussion illustrates the great potential of the Bicentennial. Any discussion of specifics raises one obvious question: Are there activities which would be useful, in the sense of meeting present problems head-on, and at the same time capable of engaging the interest and support of the whole region? Some of our suggestions do not look very appealing from this point of view. To this objection, we can only answer that, at this stage, no one but the Commission seems to be concerned with the potentially constructive impact of the Bicentennial on New England as a region. If the Commission succeeds in selling the idea that the celebration can bring something else besides tourist dollars, it will have performed a useful service. Others of our suggestions do seem to have a more solid regional appeal and the Commission can certainly generate still other alternatives.

We feel that the Commission should become involved in formulating and promoting imaginative and useful types of celebration as soon as possible. This effort should not depend on whether Boston is selected as the site of the Bicentennial Exposition. These considerations have been discussed without regard for Boston's Plans. The chances of Boston being selected as the site and, if Boston is chosen, what the fair will be like, are discussed below in terms of the implications for a program of celebrations elsewhere in New England.

The Bicentennial Exposition

In the United States, until recently fairs have traditionally been considered as profit-making enterprises and the U.S. Government has never subsidized a world's fair. The fact that very few world fairs have not run a loss has been acknowledged in other countries, and the obvious answer of public subsidy is embraced without qualms. This distinction is perhaps too sharp. Many or even most bondholders in U.S. world fairs have not expected to break even. Their investments were in reality part contributions. On the other hand, private sponsors, such as banks, local corporations, and individuals, are not willing to risk very large losses on these investments, and are even more unwilling to finance a failure from the point of view of design and image. The two large fairs of the 1960's, the New York World's Fair and Expo '67, seem to many to show that government subsidy is preferred to private sponsorship.

The New York World's Fair was a catastrophe from a number of points of view. It failed financially. The necessary commercial emphasis of the Fair -- necessary because the sponsors had to consider the profit and loss statement at every step -- seriously compromised the cohesiveness of the Fair's design, opening it to severe criticism.

Groups in Boston and Philadelphia, already interested in 1965 in the idea of a Bicentennial Exposition, were rapidly disenchanted. The New York Fair not only showed that tremendous financial risks are involved in undertaking a large exposition, but also represented a tremendous waste of resources at a time when many other problems demanded attention. Such a massive misuse of affluence seemed immoral to many.

Interest in a world's fair was revived by the success of Canada's Expo '67. Expo was a success in the sense that the fair was a memorable social and cultural event, for visitors and for Canada. Where New York's fair had been garish, Expo was subdued; where New York had been extravagant, Expo was economical. This does not mean that Expo lined its sponsor's pockets. Expo was financed by the Canadian Federal Government, the province of Quebec, and the city of Montreal, with the National Government taking a 50-percent share. It ran up a deficit of about \$200 million, over four times the originally projected amount. This figure is somewhat misleading since it refers only to the fair corporation itself, excluding capital costs and gains which accrued to the sponsoring governments, changes in tax receipts, and other items which could legitimately be excluded in a somewhat broader accounting. But it does indicate that the Canadians were willing to spend the necessary money which, in turn, allowed Expo's planners to carry out their ideas without compromising. They were able to resist pressures for a more commercial fair; in a number of cases, they insisted that individual exhibitors modify or change their plans in accord with the overall theme. Expo executives feel that relative freedom from financial pressure, and the resulting ability to concentrate effort on the creation of a coherent and meaningful design, was the key reason for the success of the Fair as a cultural event. One of them drew this explicit contrast with New York: "The profit motive was the ruin of the New York Fair".^{1/}

^{1/} Notes on a Special Briefing by Expo '67 Executives to Representatives of U.S. Interests in an American Revolution Bicentennial Exposition (July 17, 1967), unpublished notes, U.S. Department of Commerce.

Other advantages arose from government sponsorship. The preparation of the city itself for visitors, something that was comparatively neglected in New York, was done much more smoothly in Montreal under government sponsorship and prodding.

Both the Boston and Philadelphia groups have been impressed by Expo '67. At present, neither group, as far as we know, has made a serious effort to take the first traditional step towards promoting a world's fair, namely obtaining firm financial commitments from local sources. Since the decision on the site of the fair is not far away, this is particularly surprising. It indicates that neither group can conceive of a fair unless substantial Federal subsidy can be obtained. In the case of Boston, this conclusion was confirmed by our discussions with Freedom '75 officials.

Large-scale Federal participation would be a wide departure from past policy, as we have noted, but Federal policy is also in a state of flux.

To the Federal Government, the New York Fair revealed the perils of purely local planning. The Fair's primary sin was flouting the Bureau of International Expositions (BIE), an organization with offices in Paris which regulates world fairs. The BIE is a treaty organization to which about 35 countries belong; the U.S. was not a treaty signatory at that time, so that the BIE's approval was not binding on the United States in any legal sense. But previous U.S. fairs had been approved by the BIE (nonmembers can petition the organization) and had adhered to its guidelines. The New York Fair applied for approval, but was rejected because

it conflicted with Canada's proposed Expo '67 (BIE rules specify that only one Class A fair shall be held during any four-year period) and because the New York Fair proposed to run for two years (BIE rules specify a maximum run of six months). New York proceeded anyway.

This put the State Department in an awkward position. New York's violation incurred the boycott of the United Kingdom, France, Italy, and other smaller members of the BIE, who did not wish to test the BIE's sanctions against participation in unauthorized expositions. Other BIE member countries did participate in the end. For a variety of reasons, the Federal Government felt constrained to support the fair and a \$17-million investment was made in a United States pavilion. Then the fair turned out to be a gigantic flop.

These events clearly indicated the need for more Federal control. There were two factors which seemed important to the concerned Federal officials at this time: first, that another fair like New York's should be avoided; and second, that the Bicentennial Exposition should not be endangered by a privately planned fair.

11.5.
The Department of Commerce, drawing on its past experience as coordinator of planning for federally sponsored exhibits at Seattle and at earlier fairs, took the lead. In October 1964, it issued a set of rules governing official government assistance to fairs. Shortly thereafter a permanent administrative unit was formed in the Department of Commerce, called the U.S. International Expositions Review Committee. The Committee's role is to evaluate proposals for fairs, coordinate contacts with the BIE, and finally, to plan the U.S. exhibit. Since its formation, the Committee

has sponsored successful legislation making the United States a treaty member of the BIE and has come to an informal understanding with the BIE whereby 1975 or 1976 will be reserved for a major exposition in this country. Finally, it has worked with San Antonio's Hemisfair, in the first major test of the new Federal policy.

Federal policy has not changed radically as yet. Hemisfair is not federally subsidized. Originally, the fair corporation expected to make a small profit on operations and to pay off its bondholders. At present, though, it appears that Hemisfair is in trouble on this score. Attendance has not reached projected levels and recently a 25-percent cut in overhead services was made. This trend may or may not continue into the summer. At least some critics feel that part of the blame can be put on the Expositions Review Committee for their U.S. pavilion, alleged to be a lackluster performance. Whether this is justified -- the reviews have been generally good -- does not matter as much as the fact that local groups, including the Boston group, are now somewhat distrustful of the Committee's record in design. Finally, financial failure in San Antonio would reinforce the reluctance of local groups to help in financing a world's fair.

Thus, there is a strong argument that even with recent modifications, Federal policy is not adequate. The Expositions Review Committee stresses that a solid base of local financial support will be a prerequisite for a Bicentennial Exposition. On the other side, the interested groups are not ready to undertake a fair on the scale of New York and Expo without a guarantee of a large Federal subsidy. The Committee acknowledges the possibility that Federal policy

could change, but, realistically, they are aware of the difficulty of convincing the Congress.

The process of deciding on a site will probably begin in late 1969 or early 1970. At that time, the special Presidential commission charged with general responsibility for the Bicentennial celebration, the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Commission, is expected to make its first report. According to the chairman, the Commission expects, as part of this report, to recommend a site for the exposition. The Commission has not begun serious planning. Currently, it is preoccupied with obtaining operating funds from the Congress; it has no staff, no office, and has met only once as a group. Thus, it is not at all clear how the Commission will regard the idea of Federal subsidy, or what standards it will apply in evaluating proposals.

Boston and Philadelphia are the only serious contenders at this point. Both groups are in the process of completing proposals for presentation in Washington.

There are too many unknowns in the situation to allow a prediction of the outcome, obviously. But there seem to be three major possibilities. The Congress could decide that an exposition in Boston or Philadelphia will justify the cost. There would not seem to be much to choose between the two sites on the basis of present plans in this case. The two plans are quite similar in many respects. Philadelphia seems to have the edge in generating public interest, but the Boston group is aware of its deficiency in this respect and is making intensive efforts to promote the fair in Boston. On the other hand, Boston has assembled a high-powered group of consultants in the areas of design, theme development,

public relations, and fair operations, many of whom have had previous experience with world's fairs, while Philadelphia seems to be relying on local talent. The final choice might well depend on which group needs the least Federal financing. As we have noted, there seems little, at present, to differentiate the two financial plans. 1-10-67

2 A second possibility is that Congress, asked to pay for an event that will benefit primarily the local area, might react by rejecting both sites. This is a plausible alternative because there is at least one possible site on national ground, Washington, D. C. Some preliminary interest has developed in Washington. Its rather unique political status would allow Federal authorities to take the lead and be assured of the cooperation of local leadership. The popular idea -- popular even with some southern Congressmen -- that Washington should be a model city would lend support to the choice of Washington as a site. The chances for other national sites, for example a national park or a national historical shrine, are more remote. It seems unlikely that the Congress will wish to forego an exposition on the scale of Brussels and Expo '67 altogether, but this does not mean that either Boston or Philadelphia is assured of support. 1-10-67

A third possibility is that we have overestimated the reluctance of local groups to finance a world's fair in the traditional way. If Federal subsidy is clearly not forthcoming, either Boston or Philadelphia, or both, may decide to tap local sources for the majority share of the necessary finance.

We hesitate to choose any one of these alternatives as more likely than any other. The Boston fair is by no

means a certainty; it is also clear that a final decision on the exposition site could be delayed because of the complexities of the situation. These facts taken together mean that if Boston is not chosen, there will be no alternative plans, other than local plans, for the Bicentennial, and it may be too late for effective planning. Freedom '75 is interested in a world's fair; they are planning for a world's fair; and therefore their ideas probably could not be adapted to fit into a more modest framework. The Commission is in an ideal position to move into this potentially large planning vacuum.

Thus, despite the potentially large impact of the exposition on New England as a whole, the Commission must begin serious work on other plans for the Bicentennial before the decision on the site is made. This seems, on the face of it, unfortunate. It is natural to assume that the regional celebration should support the fair and be integrated with it in some fashion. An examination of Boston's plans, however, clearly show that the fair will be quite self-contained. Any attempt to tie other aspects of the Bicentennial in New England closely to the fair would be artificial. A brief description of the Freedom '75 concept illustrates this point.

The fair is to be centered around the idea of building an environment with a permanent use. Land will be created by filling in the tidal area around islands in the Harbor. Many of the fair structures themselves will be built as permanent structures, to be available after the fair is over for residential or industrial use. In effect, the fair site is conceived of as the physical framework for a livable urban community. Exhibitors, including international exhibitors, will be encouraged to develop their design with

this permanent use in mind. Such problems as transportation to and from the "mainland", the construction of livable low-income housing, and the use of open space, to mention just a few, will be solved by exhibitors. The facilities they create will be exhibits in themselves or, alternatively, will form the basis for exhibits of a temporary nature.

After the fair is over, Boston will be left with much-needed new land, already partially developed. The planners hope that many of the exhibits can be used with little modification for residences, office and factory structures, and other facilities. Further development would occur through both the public and private sector.

The theme of the fair, "The Interdependence of Man", is apt. The new neighborhood will be an embodiment of the newest, hopefully the best, ideas of what an urban environment should be. (Freedom '75 officials even talk about making such mundane facilities as water distribution and sewage disposal systems subjects for the expertise of exhibitors.) In order to achieve meaningful results, a great deal of cooperation and coordination among exhibitors -- municipal agencies, Federal agencies, and all other concerned groups -- will be required. Specifically, the plan implies central control over design, an even more rigorous central control than at Expo '67. Otherwise, the various exhibits will not fit together into the "community" which is supposed to be the end result, and Boston will be left with a group of unrelated monuments.

The final development of the site after the fair is over will pose similar problems. The goal of the fair precludes the idea of unrestricted private development;

there is no guarantee that the concept of an ideal urban environment developed in the give-and-take between the fair administration, public agencies, and exhibitors in the process of construction will be attractive to private developers. Another problem will arise in both stages: there is a difference between the best, most technologically advanced facilities, and the facilities that are economic in the context of the end-use of the site. In short, the fair is very ambitious in concept and will pose substantial challenges in execution.

This concept can stand on its own; there is no need for other activities in support of the Boston fair, in the sense of echoing its theme. Its theme, indeed, is so broad that almost any activity is in some way related to it. Thus, there is no reason why a number of events could not be planned to go on regardless of the fair. A second point is that the fair will primarily benefit Boston. It is specifically directed at solving the problems of the city. Although the whole region will benefit to the extent that tourists are attracted to the fair, the States of the region, excluding Massachusetts, will probably not render more than token support. The most that could be expected would be an exhibit sponsored by each State. It is more likely that the other States will choose to collaborate on one exhibit. Some resources would be available for other activities even if the fair takes place. Thus, to some extent, it is possible to begin planning for the Bicentennial independently of the Boston fair. We have already indicated why this is desirable and made some tentative suggestions.

Recommendations for Action

The Commission should move immediately to set up a special committee to explore the possibilities for regional

Bicentennial activities. Specific mention of the need for such groups is made in the congressional resolution activating the American Revolutionary Bicentennial Commission, where it is stated that the Commission shall give "due consideration" to programs developed by local groups. Thus, New England's activities would not be in conflict with the national commission and, in view of the fact that the national Commission has not really begun its task and will have a small staff under the present funding proposal, the participation of local groups in the planning process is essential.

The New England Commission's special committee would include a broad spectrum of community leaders -- both those who are directly concerned with education, the arts, urban problems, and other potential areas of action, and those who are in a position to muster support for the programs that are eventually developed. The committee would initially concentrate effort on eliciting ideas from its membership and from the interested public, and on setting priorities; at a later stage, it should concern itself with the feasibility of these proposals, including methods of finance and the delegation of specific planning responsibility.

The question of financing various projects deserves some further mention. We have suggested a wide variety of possible activities, and our list is certainly not exhaustive. Obviously, the method chosen will depend on who is interested in the project and who will benefit. For some projects, private sources can be tapped: foundations and corporate and private donations. Some projects may be self-liquidating after a period of time, while others will require permanent support. Another group of activities will require public money, obtained from Federal agencies, the States, or the local jurisdictions involved.

We have noted that the choice of Boston as an exposition site might limit the willingness of some of these groups to finance other events. There is no reason why well-conceived projects concerned with New England as a whole should not still attract interest and support. However, the States in particular might view the Bicentennial celebration as fulfilled in the fair. Since State support would seem to be essential for the success of any regional event, every effort should be made to formulate and present the Commission's program in such a way that this attitude is discouraged. The most obvious way of doing so is to concentrate on the area outside Boston. — *sent* —

Finally, the Commission can obviously play a role in assisting Freedom 75's presentation to the Federal authorities. Clearly there will have to be an effort to educate the Congress; in the end, there may be an intense political battle over the selection of the exposition site. If the New England delegation works together, Boston will have an advantage. The Commission can help assure that this advantage is fully exploited.

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